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ABSTRACT

Connections between recent developments in theories about language, learning theory, and language teaching are traced from Chomsky's work elaborating the distinction between competence and performance. The evolution of the concepts of function and notion from the study of how language and communication come together in linguistic philosophy is examined, and its subsequent effect on curriculum design to suit specific learner needs is chronicled. English for special purposes, the concept of nuclear English, and a later emphasis on receptive as well as productive strategies are also discussed, and the design of language programs for the learner is diagrammed. The relationship of the language model to methodology and motivation is examined through three major theoretical dichotomies in the field: the distinctions between fluency and accuracy, instrumental and integrative motivation, and language acquisition and language learning. These various concepts are then integrated into a model that illustrates that recent ways of looking at language, syllabus design, and teaching methodology are not as unconnected as they are sometimes thought to be. (Author/MSE)

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF MODERN APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE FOR TEACHER TRAINING

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1. Introduction

This paper will attempt to trace a connection between recent developments in theories about language, learning theory and language teaching.

2.1 Language Theory

Much of present day language theory is the result of a combination of influences from philosophy (particularly linguistic philosophy) and linguistics. The two disciplines had tended to work apart until the publication of Chomsky's Syntactic Structures and the consequent elaboration of the distinction between competence and performance.

Many linguists were unhappy about the way in which Chomsky excluded meaning and intention from his analysis of competence. The most telling criticism came from Hymes who in a seminal article published in the early 1970's pointed out that in order for a person to communicate adequately, much more was needed than the grammatical competence highlighted by Chomsky. The most obvious of these factors is that an utterance must be appropriate to the linguistic and non-linguistic features of the situation in which it is uttered. For example, a person who says "Please open the window" in response to the question "What day is Christmas day?" cannot really be said to exhibit communicative

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competence. Grammatical competence is not a sufficient condition for communicative competence. Nor is it a necessary condition. "Please be opening the window" may well achieve its communicative objectives despite its inadequate grammar.

2.2 Linguistic Philosophy

Linguistic philosophy had asked the question, "What is the best way to describe and account for meaningful communication?". Wittgenstein in his earlier period elaborated a very sophisticated theory that words meant because they named things or qualities that could be referred to in the world. However, as was later pointed out, names were a bad model for meaning because naming was not a way of meaning at all. The natural response to the question, "What does 'John' mean?" is that 'John' does not mean anything because it is a name. In its place Wittgenstein later substituted the "use" theory, i.e. that words and utterances have meaning because they are used in order to do things. The work of Austin concentrated on this too, as the title of his book How to Do Things with Words implies. He and his follower Searle brought to language theory the insight that frequently words or verbs (they are mainly interested in verbs) often do not so much refer to things as try to help make things happen as in:

I name this ship Brittania

or

I advise you to stop smoking

Or they show how our thoughts are to be interpreted as in:

I deny that I killed him
I would argue that he is a liar

2.3 Applied Linguistics

This is essentially the study of the practical applications

of linguistics in the fields of language learning, teaching and testing.

Here, the idea that communication and language were best explained by an analysis of language use found its expression in the term "functions of language," and soon articles and seminars were appearing using the terms "function" and "notion," often to the confusion of language teachers.

2.3.1 Functions

An understanding of the history of the idea can help to resolve any confusion. Functions have to do with language use. We use language in order to do certain things such as asking questions, making requests or giving apologies. However, not all language could be described in this way. There was the language that one used to apologize with - the notions of language.

2.3.2 Notions

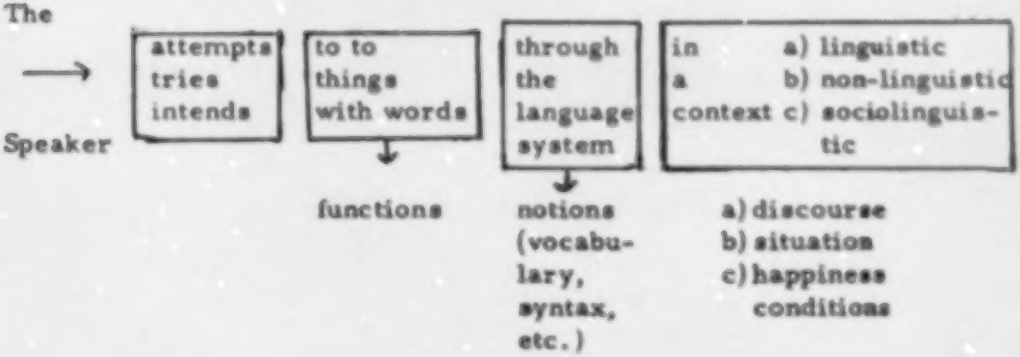
Notions are therefore essentially the ideas that we use in order to do things. They are often to be found buried in the grammatical system of the language as (im)possibility, probability and certainty can be found in the modal system: must (not), can(not), etc. or as indefiniteness/definiteness are to be found in the article system: a/the, some, etc. Alternatively they are to be found in the lexis. Thus, in the request (a function of course):

"May I open the window?"

in addition to the function we have the notions of cause change, first person pronoun definitiveness, physical object and transparence, which go to make up the meaning of the sentence.

The view of language that the above approaches lead to can

best be expressed in the following way:



3. Syllabus Design

The idea of suiting a language learning syllabus to the specific needs of the learner goes back a long way as in German for Scientists, English for Technicians, etc. Initially the emphasis was on teaching what were perceived as being the most commonly used grammatical structures and lexis in a particular discipline. However, when applied linguistics had developed the concept of functionr of language or language use, it was a short step to elaborating syllabi that tried to isolate the particular functions that would be needed by somebody learning a language for a specific purpose. This process of isolation came to be known as a needs analysis and led to syllabus design in various professional fields perhaps particularly, however, in the fields of social survival, academic contexts (EAP) and professional work (EOP).

3.1 English for Special Purposes (ESP)

A needs analysis could be more or less delicate - extremely delicate in the case of a course designed for Mexican customs

officers on the U.S. border or a Mexican student working at a university where many of the recommended books were in English. However, needs can also be more general, as in the case of the Council of Europe "Threshold Syllabus," which was intended to cover the most important general needs of migrant workers in Europe. In all these cases the predominant aim was to remove the irrelevant and make language learning more efficient.

3.2 Nuclear English (a diversion)

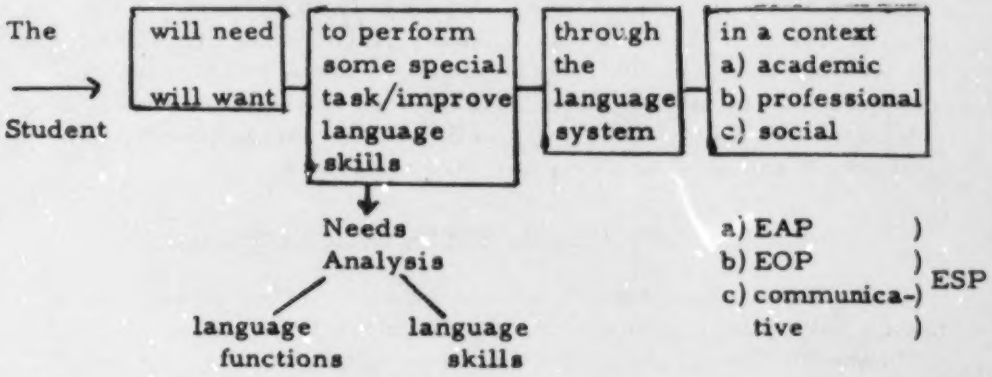
A relatively neglected aspect of the quest for efficiency in language teaching has concentrated on lessening the grammatical and vocabulary learning load on the learner. The most commonly quoted examples are air-traffic controllers and the new "Sea-speak" program being developed for merchant sailors. However, there are other more general attempts such as those of Wilkins' "minimum adequate grammar" and Quirk's "nuclear English" which would seem to merit more attention than they have received and which do come to terms with the current international importance of English as a world language rather than its purely British characteristics. For example, taking up Quirk's suggestion to substitute the North American tag "right" for the complexities of the British question tag system would save millions of hours of painful and often fruitless English instruction.

3.3 Receptive Strategies

Functional syllabi, ESP, etc. tended initially to concentrate on speaking and writing. However, later emphasis clearly had to be put on the receptive as on the productive skills. Consequently, strategies for reading and listening were brought into the picture too, as indeed in EAP were the specific skills that were needed for academic life - study skills.

3.4 Summary

A similar diagram, this time starting with the student rather than the speaker, seems to adequately summarize the way in which a language program is designed for the specialist (or, indeed, general) learner.



4. Methodology and Motivation

In section 3 we examined the relationship of the language model to syllabus design. In this section I would like to examine its relationship to theories of methodology and motivation.

It is not so easy to trace an obvious historical connection as in the case of syllabus design and ESP, and what I will try to do is to trace a conceptual connection between three influential dichotomies in the field and relate them to the model. They are Brumfit's distinction between fluency and accuracy, Stevick's between instrumental and integrative motivation, and Krashen's between language acquisition and language learning.

4.1 Fluency and Accuracy

A model in which success in the use of language (fluency) is the aim is clearly more tolerant of error than one in which learning of the code (accuracy) is the aim. Moreover, in ESP courses it was a natural to get the student to do in class tasks similar to those special tasks he was likely to perform in the outside world. Problem-solving tasks, interesting in themselves but needing language for their solution, were also introduced into the classroom to elicit language. Clearly, in this type of model more emphasis was likely to be put on elicitation than acquisition or correction and on fluency rather than accuracy.

4.2 Instrumental or Integrative Motivation

Instrumental motivation can be interpreted as perceived need - the syllabus created by the needs analysis being joyfully embraced by the student. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, the wish to integrate with the speakers of the language, was implicit in the work of many of the textbook writers more or less influenced by the functional approach. Requesting or apologizing came to mean not only doing it just like an Englishman but like a typical Englishman of a certain type. At the very time when English came to be seen as the language for international communication some writers were writing textbooks in which it was assumed that the best way to perform language functions was in a very British way. As Brumfit later pointed out, the invitation was for learners to lose their personality and cultural identity whenever the foreign language was spoken.

4.3 Language Acquisition and Language Learning

This distinction in its strongest form suggested that we could never learn language by studying the system deductively

and applying it. Learning never led to communicative use. We acquired language, building up our internal rules unconsciously as a result of language exposure. This was the only, or at least the most efficient, way to learn. Again, this can be related to, if not derived from, the language theory model as well. We learn to do things with language through the language system rather than by learning the language system and then applying it.

5. Conclusion

There is little doubt that the Wittgenstein/Austin/Searle evolution in the philosophy of language and the Hymes revolution in linguistics have affected both the content and the method of language teaching programs. The model suggested as a result of this and other factors is exemplified in the model below, suggesting that recent ways of looking at language, syllabus design and teaching methodology are not as unconnected as they are sometimes thought to be.

1	2	3	4	5
The Student	is motivated	by solving problems	through the language system	in a context resembling real life
	i.e. the teacher motivates	acquisition	accuracy following fluency	language games role-play simulations